

The Montgomery County Council needs to collaborate with unions

Sunday, December 12, 2010; 8:08 PM

Regarding the Dec. 10 editorial "Stacked deck," on Montgomery County's budget problems and its authority over contracts:

Changes to county arbitration law proposed by County Council President Valerie Ervin (D-Silver Spring) would allow future councils to pass the buck, providing political cover for refusing to make difficult choices about funding collective bargaining agreements.

On its face, the county's ability to pay is a reasonable consideration for an arbitrator. However, this proposal is meant not for the relief of taxpayers but to provide excuses to the council for inaction.

Current law provides a role in bargaining that the council refuses to play. In the past, council members had to explain, with convolutions, their refusal to act regarding contract funding. With this proposal, the excuse for inaction becomes "we need to respect the arbitration process." This bill would place critical budget decisions on automatic pilot and shift a vast responsibility from elected council members to an outside arbitrator unaccountable to voters, the administration, unions or even the council.

Instead of hiding behind an arbitrator, the council should show leadership and set policy that forges a true collaborative partnership between the County Council, public employee unions and the administration to best serve the interests of everyone living and working in Montgomery County.

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